

Unearthing the Buried City

The Janet Translation Project

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This document is part of *Unearthing the Buried City: The Janet Translation Project*, a series of AI-assisted English translations of Pierre Janet's works.

In his seminal 1970 book: *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, Henri Ellenberger wrote:

Thus, Janet's work can be compared to a vast city buried beneath ashes, like Pompeii. The fate of any buried city is uncertain. It may remain buried forever. It may remain concealed while being plundered by marauders. But it may also perhaps be unearthed some day and brought back to life (p. 409).

This project takes Ellenberger's metaphor seriously — and literally. The goal of this work is to unearth the buried city of Janet's writings and make them accessible to the English-speaking world, where much of his legacy remains obscured or misunderstood.

Pierre Janet was a pioneer of dynamic psychology, psychopathology, hypnosis, and dissociation. His influence on Freud, Jung, and the broader psychotherapeutic tradition is profound, yet the bulk of his original writings remain untranslated or scattered in partial form. These AI-assisted translations aim to fill that gap — provisionally — by making Janet's works readable and searchable in English for the first time.

This is not an academic translation, nor does it claim to replace one. It is a faithful, literal rendering produced with the aid of AI language tools such as Chat GPT and DeepL and lightly edited for clarity. Its purpose is preservation, accessibility, and revival. By bringing these texts to light, I hope to:

- Preserve Janet's contributions in a readable English form
- Spark renewed interest among scholars, clinicians, and students
- Inspire human translators to produce definitive, academically rigorous editions

Note on Some Phenomena of Somnambulism¹

Pierre Janet

Presented to the *Society of Physiological Psychology*, Nov. 30, 1885 — Session presided by Dr. Charcot

Thanks to the kindness of a well-known physician in the city of Le Havre, Dr. Gibert, I was able to observe for about two weeks certain curious phenomena of somnambulism. The facts I observed have already been noted by many other observers; but, as they are quite strange and, up to now, completely inexplicable, they are far from being accepted by everyone concerned with such questions. It is therefore not useless to describe them once more. The Society of Physiological Psychology, which has done me the honor of naming me a corresponding member, will not, I hope, refuse to grant some attention to the observations I report with the greatest possible accuracy.

The subject on whom these experiments were conducted is a good woman from the countryside, whom we will refer to as Madame B. She has always been, as far as one can tell, in very good health, and in particular she presents no signs of hysteria in her normal state. She has only been subject, since childhood, to natural episodes of somnambulism during which she can speak and describe the strange hallucinations she seems to experience. Her character in ordinary life is very honest, very simple, and above all very timid; although her intelligence appears quite sound, Madame B. has received no formal education — she does not know how to write and barely spells a few letters. Several doctors have already, it seems, wished to conduct some experiments on her, but she has always refused their proposals. It was only at the request of Dr. Gibert that she agreed to come spend a few days in Le Havre, from September 24 to October 14, 1885, and it was during this short stay that we had the opportunity to observe her.

It is fairly easy to place Madame B. into a state of artificial somnambulism; it is enough to hold her hand and lightly squeeze it for a few moments. After a period that is more or less long, depending on the person inducing the state, her gaze becomes vacant, her eyelids are agitated by small, often very rapid movements, until the eyeball disappears under the upper eyelid. At the same time, her chest rises with effort; a clear state of discomfort seems to overtake the subject. Almost every time — if not absolutely every time — the body is shaken by very fleeting but real tremors; Madame B. lets out a deep sigh and falls backward, plunged into a deep sleep. Dr. Gibert would bring about this sleep by holding her hand for two minutes; it always took me three or four. Madame B. then takes on the appearance of a person deeply asleep: her limbs are flaccid; if one lifts them, they fall back under their full weight without any voluntary

¹ Janet, Pierre. "Note sur quelques phénomènes de somnambulisme." *Bulletin de la Société de Psychologie Physiologique*, i (1885), pp. 24–32. Reproduced in *Revue Philosophique*, xxi (1886), I, pp. 190–198.

movement; insensitivity appears complete — neither noise, whatever its nature, nor even a focused beam of light directed at the eyes, nor pinching, nor burning of the skin provokes any reaction. Only the pupil contracts, and even that incompletely, under the influence of a very bright light. Nonetheless, there is a type of stimulation to which Madame B. remains sensitive during this sleep. The person who has put her to sleep — and that person alone — has the power to induce, at will, a partial or general contracture. It is enough, for example, for him to place a finger in forced extension for it to become stiff like a piece of wood, and an outsider cannot bend it. If at that moment the magnetizer so much as lightly touches the contracted finger, it instantly relaxes. To induce a general contracture, it suffices for the magnetizer to place his outstretched hand a short distance in front of the body. One first observes certain tremors, then the body rises and follows the hand, as if it were truly being drawn by it. But the muscles are in violent contracture, and since they follow the movements of the hand, it follows that one can easily provoke postures contrary to the ordinary laws of seated balance. Moreover, all such stimulations during this phase of sleep never awaken Madame B. It is very important to note that the contracture phenomena we have just described are produced only by the person who induced the sleep; any other person can touch her or press on her joints without provoking the slightest reaction. I noted only one small exception: Dr. F., who had not put the subject to sleep, provoked a slight shudder by bringing his hand close, but he could neither attract the body nor produce the contracture. This induction of contracture can therefore be considered, at least in this subject, as a characteristic sign that could serve, if necessary, to identify the person who induced the sleep. Moreover, this person retains a particular influence over Madame B. for the entire duration of the sleep. He can stop the rigidity with a few light passes in front of the body; he can cause even the most persistent contractures to vanish almost instantly by placing his forehead against that of the subject; he can suppress the headaches that the subject complained of before sleeping by placing his hand on her forehead for a few moments; finally, he can change at will the dreams that soon begin to invade the subject's mind, simply by touching her forehead or pressing on her brow ridges.

Indeed, after about ten minutes — sometimes more — the sleep appears to become less deep; Madame B. seems to be dreaming, she changes her expression rapidly and begins to speak aloud. Soon she sits up and enters that particular state which professional magnetizers call the lucid state, and which may be referred to as true somnambulism. She is now very sensitive to all impressions; she hears everything said to her and responds intelligently. But her personality, as has been frequently noted, is no longer at all the same as in the waking state. Instead of being simple and timid, Madame B. suddenly becomes very bold, very lively, full of whims, and quite inclined to mock everyone — sometimes wittily. After remaining in this state for a while — twenty minutes or more — Madame B. appears tired, especially if she has been pestered with difficult questions; she reclines backward again and spontaneously returns to the sleep state I previously described. Again, after about fifteen minutes, she awakens into somnambulism, only to return again to the first state, and she alternates between these two states

for the entire duration of the sleep. It is during one of the somnambulistic phases that Madame B. can be fully awakened; to do this, one must blow on her eyes and stir the air in front of her face with the hands — but once again, only the person who induced the sleep is able to awaken her successfully. Such is the general description of the induced sleep in Madame B., a description that was necessary to provide before emphasizing certain particularly interesting points.

We sought to determine, in experiments unfortunately too few in number, under what conditions and by what influence sleep was induced. At first, I supposed that fixing the gaze played some role here, as had often been observed. But it was not difficult to eliminate this hypothesis; we could put Madame B. to sleep just as easily, and without taking any more time, even if her eyes were closed or covered with a blindfold. The pressure of the hand, on the other hand, seems to have greater importance: one day, I had put Madame B. to sleep by pressing her hand more firmly and for longer than usual, and the sleep appeared to be much deeper. By this I mean that the phases that one might call lethargic were much longer, while the episodes of somnambulism were rarer and shorter. If instead of simply pressing the hand, one places one's thumb exactly against that of the subject, sleep is induced much more quickly; I succeeded in putting her to sleep this way in one minute, whereas it normally took me three. But while the pressure of the hand has a certain influence, it is also evident that it is not the sole cause — nor even the principal cause — of the sleep. One day, Dr. Gibert was holding Madame B.'s hand to put her to sleep, but he was visibly preoccupied and thinking about something other than what he was doing: the sleep did not occur at all. This experiment, repeated by me in various ways, showed us that in order to put Madame B. to sleep, one had to strongly concentrate one's thought on the command to sleep being given to her, and that the more the operator's thought was distracted, the more difficult it was to induce sleep. This influence of the operator's thought, however extraordinary it may seem, is in this case entirely predominant — to such a degree that it can replace all others. If one presses Madame B.'s hand without thinking of putting her to sleep, one fails to induce sleep; on the contrary, if one thinks of putting her to sleep without pressing her hand, one succeeds perfectly. Indeed, we left Madame B. seated at the far end of the room, and then, without touching her and without saying anything, Dr. Gibert, standing at the opposite end, simply thought that he wanted to put her to sleep: after three minutes, the lethargic sleep occurred. I repeated the same experiment several times with the greatest ease; it sufficed, while remaining in the same room, to strongly think that I wanted to put her to sleep — and she would, in fact, fall asleep. I even succeeded in putting her to sleep this way one day against her will, and even though she was in a state of great agitation — although it took me five minutes of effort. Under the circumstances I describe, it is not absolutely certain, I admit, that it was truly one of our thoughts that put Madame B. to sleep. One could perhaps suppose — and this is doubtless what M. Bernheim would argue — that this is simply a case of ordinary suggestion of sleep. Could not our presence, our posture, and the silence have suggested to this woman the idea of sleep, and thus brought about sleep itself? This is, strictly speaking, possible — however, there are some difficulties. It has happened to me, while waiting for Dr.

Gibert, to remain near Madame B. in the same meditative posture, in the same silence, without thinking of putting her to sleep — and sleep did not begin at all. On the other hand, as soon as — without changing my posture — I thought about giving the command to sleep, the subject's eyes became fixed, and lethargy soon began. Secondly, if the posture of those present had suggested the sleep, I would not understand why only the person who had induced the sleep by thought was able, during the lethargy, to provoke the characteristic phenomena of contracture and attraction. In summary, based on these facts, the supposition that our thought influenced the subject and contributed to inducing the sleep appears somewhat plausible.

That is why we carried out, in the same direction, some experiments which in my opinion were more decisive and more curious. Without informing Madame B. of his intention, Dr. Gibert shut himself in a nearby room, at a distance of six or seven meters from the subject, and there attempted to give her the mental command to sleep. I had remained near the subject and observed that after a few moments her eyes closed and sleep began. But what seems to me particularly curious is that, in this lethargic state, she was not at all under my influence. I was unable to provoke either contracture or attraction in her, even though I had been near her while she was falling asleep. On the contrary, she obeyed Dr. Gibert completely, although he had not been present; in fact, it was Dr. Gibert who had to awaken her, and this clearly proves that it was he who had put her to sleep. However, even here, some doubt may remain. Madame B. was certainly aware of Dr. Gibert's presence in the house; she also knew that he had come to put her to sleep. So, although it seems to me quite unlikely, one could suppose that she had put herself to sleep by suggestion, at the very moment when Dr. Gibert gave her the command from the next room.

On October 3, I went to see Dr. Gibert at 11:30 in the morning and asked him to put Madame B. to sleep by a mental command, without leaving his office. This woman had not been informed in any way, for we had never attempted to put her to sleep at that hour; she was in another house at least 500 meters away. I went to her *immediately afterward* to observe the result of this strange command. As I had rather expected, she was not asleep at all: I then put her to sleep myself by touching her, and as soon as she entered somnambulism — before I asked her any questions — she began to speak as follows: "I know very well that Dr. Gibert wanted to put me to sleep... but when I felt it, I went looking for water and put my hands in cold water... I don't want to be put to sleep that way... I might be in the middle of talking... it disturbs me and makes me look silly." Verification showed that she had, in fact, placed her hands in cold water before I arrived. I have reported this experiment, although it failed, because it seems interesting to me from several points of view. Madame B. thus appears to be aware — even in the waking state — of this influence that seizes her; she can resist sleep by putting her hands in cold water; and finally, she did not lend herself willingly to these experiments, which may be taken as a sign of her sincerity.

On October 9, I again visited Dr. Gibert and asked him to put Madame B. to sleep — not immediately, but at twenty minutes to noon. I then went *directly* to her, without Dr. Gibert, who, I am certain, had no communication with her. I

intended to prevent her from putting her hands in cold water if she tried it again. I was unable to monitor her as I had planned, because she had been shut in her room for about fifteen minutes already, and I judged it unnecessary to call her down. At a quarter to noon, I went up to her with several other people who accompanied me: Madame B. was slumped on a chair in a very uncomfortable position and was deeply asleep. The sleep was not natural sleep, for she was completely insensible and could not be awakened at all. Let us also note that neither I nor any of the people present had any influence over her and were entirely unable to provoke the contracture. Here are the first words she spoke as soon as the somnambulism spontaneously declared itself: "Why did they send them like that?... I forbid you to make me do such foolish things... do I look stupid!... why is he putting me to sleep from his house, Dr. Gibert... I didn't have time to put my hands in my basin... I don't want this." Since I had no influence over her, it was impossible for me to wake her, and as we could not leave her in that state, it was necessary to go fetch Dr. Gibert. As soon as he arrived, he provoked all the phenomena that I had been unable to elicit that day, and finally, he woke her very easily. Can one believe that, in this circumstance, my presence in the house and my knowledge of the time I had chosen for sleep to occur could have influenced her and caused her to fall asleep? I do not think so, but still, the supposition was possible. We resolved to perform the experiment in a different manner.

On October 14, Dr. Gibert promised me that he would put Madame B. to sleep at a distance, at any hour of the day that he would either choose himself or be given by a third party, but which I would not know. I did not arrive at the pavilion where Madame B. was until around 4:30 p.m.; she had already been asleep for a quarter of an hour, and therefore I had nothing to do with this sleep, which I merely confirmed. The same insensitivity and the same characteristics as before were present, except that the lethargy appeared even deeper, for there were no somnambulistic episodes at all. However, other phenomena occurred that day, but they pertain to a different line of inquiry, which I will address shortly. Dr. Gibert did not arrive until 5:30 p.m.; he then told me that, at the suggestion of Mr. D..., he had thought of putting her to sleep around 4:15 p.m., and that he had been in Graville at that time — that is, at least two kilometers from Madame B. Moreover, he was easily able to provoke the contracture and awaken the subject. It would have been good to repeat this experiment several times, and it is unfortunate that Madame B.'s departure prevented us from doing so. Nevertheless, it seems decisive to me, if one considers that it only completes the previous experiments and connects with other facts of the same kind that we still have to present.

On October 14, the same day that Madame B. had been put to sleep from Graville, I observed the following phenomena during her sleep: at exactly 5:00 p.m., while still sleeping, Madame B. began to moan and tremble, then murmured these words: "Enough... enough... don't do that... you are mean." She sat up and, still moaning, stood up and took a few steps, then suddenly burst out laughing, fell back into the chair, and returned to deep sleep. At 5:05 the exact same scene was repeated; she again became agitated, trembled, and moaned; she lifted herself, stood up, and seemed to want to walk. After a few moments, she laughed

again and said: “You can’t... if you’re even a little, just a little distracted, I catch myself again,” and indeed she lay back down and fell asleep again. The same scene occurred again at 5:40. When Dr. Gibert arrived at 5:30, he showed me a card that had been handed to him by a third person, Mr. D...; he could not have had any communication with Madame B. since the moment the card was given to him. On it, he was asked to mentally command Madame B. to perform various rather complex actions every five minutes starting from 5:00 p.m. These actions, obviously too complex, had not been carried out; but at the very moment when Dr. Gibert was issuing the commands from Graille, I had seen — two kilometers away — the effects these commands produced and a real beginning of execution. It truly seemed that Madame B. had sensed these orders, had resisted them, and had only been able to disobey due to a kind of distraction on Dr. Gibert’s part. We repeated this experiment while placing ourselves near her during the lethargic sleep. It is strange to note that the result was not more pronounced, as one might have expected. By a mental command, the person who put Madame B. to sleep can fairly easily cause her to sit up and even stand completely; but whether due to insufficient concentration of thought or for some other reason, Madame B. soon, as she herself says, “catches herself again” and falls backward. The command given mentally has an influence that appears immediately; but, as far as we have been able to observe, this influence does not seem any stronger at close range than at a distance. But mental suggestions — for that word seems to me quite appropriate here — can be made upon Madame B. in another manner and with an entirely different level of success. As we have said, one rarely succeeds when one gives her the order to execute an action immediately during sleep; one succeeds much more when one gives her, mentally, the command to perform an action some time after awakening.

On October 8, Dr. Gibert made a suggestion of this kind: *without saying a word*, he brought his forehead close to that of Madame B. during lethargic sleep and concentrated his thought for a few moments on the command he was giving her. Madame B. appeared to experience a painful impression and let out a groan; otherwise, the sleep did not seem to be disturbed at all. Dr. Gibert told no one what command he had given and simply wrote it down on a piece of paper, which he sealed in an envelope. The next day, I returned to see Madame B. to observe the effect of this suggestion, which was supposed to take place between 11:00 and noon. At 11:30, the woman showed great agitation, left the kitchen where she had been, and went into a room to take a glass, which she carried with her; then, overcoming her shyness, she decided to enter the salon where I was and, quite flustered, asked if someone had called her. On my negative reply, she left and continued several times to go from the kitchen to the salon without bringing anything. She did nothing more that day, for she soon fell asleep at a distance by Dr. Gibert’s action. Here is what she said during her sleep: “I was trembling when I came to ask if someone had called me... I had to come... it wasn’t easy coming with that tray... why do they want to make me carry glasses... what was I going to say, wasn’t it... I don’t want you to do that... I had to say something when I came.” Upon opening the envelope, I saw that Dr. Gibert had ordered the day before that Madame B. was to “offer a glass of water to each of the gentlemen.” Again, it

must be acknowledged that the experiment had not entirely succeeded — the suggestion had not been carried out; but can one deny that it had been understood?

Now here is a more conclusive experiment. On October 10, Dr. Gibert and I agreed to make the following suggestion: “Tomorrow at noon, lock the doors of the house.” I wrote the suggestion on a piece of paper, which I kept with me and did not show to anyone. Dr. Gibert made the suggestion as before by bringing his forehead to that of Madame B. The next day, when I arrived at a quarter to noon, I found the house barricaded and the door locked. Upon inquiry, it was Madame B. who had just locked it; when I asked her why she had performed such a strange act, she replied: “I felt very tired and didn’t want you to be able to come in to put me to sleep.” M. Bernheim and M. Richet have already spoken of those individuals who invent reasons to explain to themselves an act they perform necessarily under the influence of a suggestion. At that moment, Madame B. was very agitated; she continued to wander in the garden, and I saw her pick a rose and go to check the mailbox near the front gate. These acts are of no great importance, but it is curious to note that they were precisely the acts we had briefly considered suggesting to her the day before. We had ultimately decided on a different order — to lock the doors — but the thought of the earlier suggestions had undoubtedly occupied Dr. Gibert’s mind while he was issuing the command and had also exerted its influence. Here is a third experiment, which might not be worth recounting since it succeeded less well than the previous one, but it is still interesting, as it shows how much the subject can resist these mental suggestions. On October 13, Dr. Gibert again gave her — only by thought — the order to open an umbrella the next day at noon and to walk twice around the garden.

The next day, she was very agitated at noon, walked around the garden twice, but did not open an umbrella. I put her to sleep shortly afterward to calm an agitation that was becoming increasingly intense. Her first words were: “Why did you make me walk all around the garden... I looked so silly... if only it had been like yesterday’s weather for example... but today I would’ve looked completely ridiculous.” That day was very fine, and the previous day it had rained a lot: she had not wanted to open an umbrella in fine weather for fear of looking ridiculous. The suggestion had at least been understood, even if it had not been fully executed. M. Charles Richet, in his book *L’Homme et l’intelligence*, wrote not long ago: “According to them [professional magnetizers], a magnetic subject can carry out a command thought but not expressed by the magnetizer. I have often tried to verify this assertion. I have never been able to succeed. However, the incoherent results I have obtained allow me to affirm that the question must not be settled by an a priori negation. It deserves further investigation and study.” (p. 184). I am pleased that M. Charles Richet, so competent in this field, has admitted the possibility of such phenomena. I hope he will find worthy of attention the facts I have had the occasion to collect, which in reality only serve to confirm his opinion.

The facts I have just recounted have a common character; they all show in Madame B. a kind of faculty — I do not know what kind — for perceiving the thoughts of others, and it does indeed seem that this is one of the principal

features observed in her somnambulistic state. Madame B. seems to experience most of the sensations felt by the person who put her to sleep. She believed she was drinking herself, and one could see the act of swallowing occur in her throat when that person drank. She always recognized exactly the substance I placed in my mouth and perfectly distinguished whether I was tasting salt, pepper, or sugar. I would have liked to study these phenomena carefully, for they are in fact rather simple and verifiable, and I intended to use for that purpose the method employed by M. Richet in the recent research he published in the *Revue philosophique*. Like him, I wanted to compare correct responses and incorrect ones, and to show that the number of correct ones exceeded the number of successes predicted by the laws of probability. I encountered a great number of difficulties:

(1) Madame B., in the somnambulistic state, was far from docile and most often refused to concern herself with things she found insignificant;

(2) It was not possible to compare successes and errors, since she did not attempt to guess and only answered when she felt something, or else did not answer at all;

(3) One last observation further complicated this research. I wanted Madame B. to describe photographs that she could not see, but which I held in my hands. I discovered that she described them just as well when I did not know them as when I did. Seven times in a row, she correctly identified which portrait I had touched before anyone had looked at it.

This, I believe, is no longer a case of thought perception. These are facts of an entirely different kind, and before asserting anything, they require very careful verification.

That is why I do not wish, at this time, to communicate to the Society of Physiological Psychology the large number of facts of this kind that I have recorded, but which I still wish — if I have the opportunity — to subject to the most rigorous scrutiny.

I deliberately refrain from drawing conclusions: I do not wish to propose any theory or attempt any explanation. I have merely wanted to bring to the attention of the Society of Physiological Psychology some facts that I have had the occasion to observe. I believe that many people who have studied somnambulism must have seen similar ones, and I hope they will be willing to make them known. To collect, without prejudice of any kind, these apparently mysterious phenomena might be the best way to clarify the problem and to contribute to the advancement of the psychological sciences.

Le Havre, November 14, 1885.

Pierre Janet